



Times-Standard

ECS unanimously approves budget, layoffs

Donna Tam/The Times-Standard

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With some hard decisions before them, the Eureka City Schools Board of Education unanimously approved the 2009/10 budget Wednesday night and approved layoffs for more than 35 support staff positions.

Chief Business Official Richard Hanger walked the council through a cautious budget, with the district's total general fund to be projected as \$36.4 million.

The number reflects the governor's proposal of a zero cost of living adjustment and across-the-board reductions that amount to a nearly 20 percent rollback from 2007/08 funding levels.

The cut would bring funding would be back to the 2000/01 levels, Superintendent Gregg Haulk said.

Hanger said the general fund expenditures should equal \$35.7 million.

"Your budget is so balanced that you don't have room to hiccup," Hanger said.

Part of the balancing will include a \$2 million transfer from the Adult Education fund, cutting programs by 50 percent, while maintaining restricted programs, such as the GED program. Restricted programs are funded separately, but they may be eliminated by 2011/12 if the state's financial situation continues to worsen, Hanger said, adding

that Adult Education is one of the few programs the district can take from.

The district issued layoffs for the Adult Education program last week.

Haulk said the district has issued the layoffs for Adult Education staff to ensure that it has the flexibility to decide which programs are kept for next year.

Bobbie Hayes, senior secretary for the Eureka Adult School, spoke out during public comment, not in protest of the layoffs, but of ongoing labor negotiations. She said the California School Employees Association has been in negotiations over its expired contract for the last year.

"We may not be teachers, we may not be administrators, but we work hard for you all the time," Hayes said, appealing to the district to agree on a contract.

Other public speakers brought up the importance of librarians and libraries for student education.

The 26 positions to be laid off included six bus drivers and librarians from every elementary school and Winship Middle School.

Speakers pleaded with board members to be careful not to do away with library programs, which have already been strained by reduced hours.

Parent Marilyn Mathewson brought up the issue of transportation. She said she was concerned about the layoff of bus drivers, but realized that the board has some tough decisions to make. The state has plans to cut transportation funds except for a few required services.

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"The board may not be able to do anything about it," Mathewson said. "So we can't argue about it, as parents we need to fix it."

She said she wanted to know how to help as a parent, especially for children whose parents can't drive them to school in the morning if bus routes are cut.

At the end of his presentation, Hanger reminded the board that the budget will be a "living, breathing document," and will continue to change as the process in Sacramento continues.

"We are truly holding our breath as we go into this next fiscal year," he said.

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